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ABSTRACT

There is little reason why educational research in Australia should be progressive and highly developed, given that its history and direction are subject to the economic and political determinants of an increasingly globalized and uncertain world. Educational research cannot be a neutral endeavor; it demands that researchers identify a political perspective or world view from which new knowledge is described and interpreted. Such fundamental questions have confronted the design and implementation of Nyerna Studies, a bachelor of education program being conducted in partnership between Victoria University of Technology and the Koori people of the Echuca region of Australia. The program is highly innovative and community-based, pursuing holistic and enquiry learning and projects that are negotiated around integrated areas of student interest. "Naturalistic inquiry" processes are more appropriate to generating community knowledge than the more formal processes of the physical sciences. With participatory action research, Nyerna Studies is addressing issues of community partnership and two-way enquiry learning, with opportunities for cultural interaction and influence on the educational public sphere. Participatory action research may be the only framework appropriate for democratic community research, although it is not yet legitimated within the pantheon of available methodologies and philosophies. (Contains 22 references.) (Author/SV)

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Participatory Action Research And The Struggle For Legitimation

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Participatory Action Research And The Struggle For Legitimation

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Abstract

There is little reason why educational research in Australia should be progressive and highly developed given that its history and direction are subject to the economic and political determinants of an increasingly globalised and uncertain world. Whether or not educational research is an entirely derivative field or a semi-distinctive social science, is essentially qualitative or quantitative in character, desires knowledge that is vaguely accurate or accurately vague, seeks epistemological or ontological explanation, remains to be seen as history works itself out. It cannot be considered a neutral endeavour and demands that researchers identify a political perspective or worldview from which new knowledge is described and interpreted. Such fundamental questions have confronted the design and implementation of Nyerna Studies, a Bachelor of Education program being conducted in partnership between Victoria University of Technology and the Indigenous peoples of the Echuca region of Australia. In developing an approach to participatory action research, a number of challenges and knowledges have emerged from Nyerna Studies involving community partnership, two-way enquiry learning and the educational public sphere. Participatory action research as outlined here may be the only framework appropriate for democratic community research although it is not as yet legitimated within the pantheon of available methodologies and philosophies.

A critical perspective of knowledge production

Depending on your point of view, there are both similarities and differences between the formal approaches to research and knowledge production adopted in the physical and social sciences. Some approaches are essentially qualitative or quantitative in both fields and of course, both can contain a mix (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Some rely on what might be called scientific measurement and see truth residing in data, whereas others are more interpretive and provide scope for less closely defined outcomes. The quest for certainty in the physical sciences is not always replicated in the social sciences where a growing and flexible understanding of the human condition over time can be seen as more appropriate. The notion that truth is more transient and localised rather than more permanent and generalised is stronger in the social sciences.

At base, new knowledge whether personal or fundamental needs to impact upon the human organism in some way so that learning can occur. One view of learning suggests that humans come to new understandings through the take-up of procedure leading to pre-determined behaviour, while a second view concentrates on immersion in experience that is essentially integrated and unpredictable. Techniques within educational institutions to achieve both ends can be conservative or radical, instructional or constructional, but both epistemologies are valid; the structures of the brain can be impacted upon by procedure and experience alike to encourage new learning. This means that researchers need to design their research programs with a specific world view regarding human knowledge in mind and not assume that the research process, or indeed knowledge itself, are neutral endeavours. As Carspecken and Apple (1992) confirm:

> All social research is informed from its very beginnings as a set of concerns or questions in the mind of the researcher by a particular orientation that implicitly or explicitly bears a theoretical view.

For educational research, it is often the case that identification of an epistemological and philosophical perspective as forming the basis of the work, is lacking. Practitioner research (Aspland et al, 2000) on the other hand, or approaches that require community participation, involve a set of added features not present in more conventional paradigms. While the usual aim of practitioner research is improved practice alone, the outcomes can often impinge on new knowledge regarding organizational structure and procedure and move past the 'what works' to a more generalised level. Provided that a systematic process for so doing is included. This raises the question of the expressed purpose of a research program. On the one hand, the pursuit of knowledge can be seen from a purely disinterested perspective. Indeed, knowledge itself and theories arising are considered neutral, without a real purpose other than understanding. Conversely, research can be located within the broad spectrum of human activity for social progress where knowledge has a distinctly ideological location. The first approach is more technical and idealistic in orientation, the second more critical and emancipatory.

According to Fay (1987), critical theory seeks to 'explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of this social order.' A critical, emancipatory perspective of research therefore or of education as a critical social science, would suggest explanation or emergent theory that enables significant change to major aspects of both society and the field. We can infer from this that such radical discontinuities and transformations are substantial and progressive. The notion of emancipation is important here. Not only will the actual products of research influence society, but the very act of participation and reflection on ideas and themes will encourage the researchers to challenge their own values and beliefs and become different more enlightened people. Ultimately for humanity, this collective process of reflection on the nature of the universe and development of a deeper understanding of physical and social properties will assist a unity or integration with the environment and a state of mind embodying contentment and satisfaction. Personal emancipation of this type will be incomplete and constrained by social conditions, but can be approached over time.

The establishment of an appropriate and realistic framework for the application of critical theory and critical research is a complicated task. Fay (ibid, p 31-32) has detailed a collection of theories that will be required involving those of false consciousness, crisis, education and transformative action. Most of these ideas will not be found in research programs and certainly will not be found in educational research. Being aware of one's own history or consciousness forms the basis of how we understand our interpretation of phenomena and the reasons for our views. Crisis can refer to the changing social conditions and difficulties that afflict society generally or in specific areas and which then become the focus of personal concern. A theory of education will enable an understanding of the prevailing conditions so that a defensible action plan to change those conditions can be formulated. Critical social theory and critical research needs to take such concepts and connect with the best methodologies that are available to move forward.

Participatory action research

Action research and participatory action research in particular have a strong literature base and appear to be the obvious framework for critical educational research (Reason and Bradbury,

2001). The scope of action research according to McTaggart (1991) involves enquiry that 'transforms the ways teachers see themselves' and 'must be oriented to transforming the situations which place obstacles in the way of achieving educational goals, perpetuate ideological distortions and impede rational and critical work in educational situations'. Apart from the central issues noted above regarding the nature and perspective of knowledge, two other concepts must be examined, those of action research itself and of participation.

Action research may be conceived as little more than a technique to improve the daily practice of a group or organisation. The amount of reflection involved for example may be minimal and certainly not linked to a cyclical and systematic investigation of issues resulting in new or reconfigured understandings, in other words a new humanity. Action research can be described and enacted in technical, practical, or emancipatory terms and to move along this continuum seems to necessitate an increasing participation. Research conducted in isolation will lack the stimulation of immediate feedback, the development of challenging tangents and prospects and the contestation of differing perspectives and cultures. Research that is conducted as a democratic group particularly with the inclusion of an outsider or critical friend will have greater opportunity of leaping into the unknown and of constructing creative resolutions to the tasks at hand. To incorporate the features of knowledge production and critical social science, a series of activities similar to the following may be required:

- Establishment of a participatory research team involves a usually small group of practitioners with similar interests who are willing to become involved in a systematic enquiry of an issue over an extended time. Initial discussions can include consideration of political viewpoints and world views and a clarification of the reasons for the work. There needs to be broad agreement as to the way knowledge is generated and how ideas are grounded and challenged. At this stage, the operation of the group should also be examined to ensure that the discourse to come, particularly when difficult issues arise will be democratic, rigorous and continuing. The question of personal disclosure is of central importance.

- Drafting of the research proposal will need to take into account the issues of resources and co-ordination, but of most significance is the ideological direction of the work as expressed in the questions to be pursued, the methodology adopted and how the project is connected with socio-economic parameters. A research perspective is required such as that of critical theory, feminist, positivist and the like so that an appropriate method can be decided. Data collection and strategies for interpretation, analysis and generalisation also reflect political outlook and the fundamental interests for which the research is being conducted. Ensuring democratic discourse and communication throughout requires constant vigilance.

- Short turn-around times or cycles should occur, rather than those that are prolonged and mean that the thinking of participants has moved on before it can be studied or even recognised. This is common in the working environment where issues have to be sorted out quickly as they arise, thus influencing thought and action to some extent every day. This approach does not suggest that periods of extended reflection and theorising cannot occur along the way indeed this is a necessary condition. As new practice and experience becomes available, it needs to be consolidated, tempered with external factors and contribute to new immediate cycles. All participants including critical friends are involved

in this process, of moving from perceptual to conceptual knowledge and then return to new situations as the main feature of birthing new knowledges and tentative understandings.

- Personal theorising takes place on a regular basis as well, as humans attempt to make sense of their situations, local and global. The process of theorising will result in many incomplete views being formed and even those views that take a stronger form will be subject to change throughout the project and life. All citizens will have a set of ideas that constitute an ideology, theories that govern their practice and theories that impact upon how they interact with society. These are issues that should be transparent from the beginning of the work and should be discussed as the work encourages change. A process of transformative consciousness takes place for the researchers as their experience causes new thinking at deeper levels. Different aspects of different contradictions contend for influence and this will be resolved for a time until the process is restimulated and continues. Personal and general theories are brought into play, one merging into the other until new cognitive structures are created.

- The exposure of changed thinking by researchers can be revealed throughout the process and certainly at the formal conclusion of the research. This would be seen as an additional task in academic research but an essential component of participatory research. Public dialogue and writing are important strategies in allowing this to occur and in the contestation of ideas. Groups may be a little reluctant to expose incomplete thinking, but this fits nicely with the concept of generating practitioner knowledge. It could also be expected that many groups unfamiliar with an action research approach to understanding and theorising will be doubtful of the process and will raise issues of rigour, quality and validation. Practitioner research is in many ways more complicated than academic work given that it deliberately confronts a complex net of social and educational factors that are seen to interact constantly and which exist within a political and cultural gel. It is the very explication of such an arrangement that leads to quality rather than the simplistic measurement of isolated knowledge indicators.

- Systematic intervention in the process of discourse and principle formation is essential if new thinking is to be observed. This is usually done via a critical friend or a small group of trusted colleagues who meet regularly to discuss the research and to challenge views that are partially developed. A 'critical analysis group' that meets every month or two sets up avenues for reflection that may not be otherwise present and has a deliberate process of ensuring that ideas are defensible for passage to the next phase. This step is crucial for Indigenous groups so that a cultural viewpoint can be brought to bear at key points and prevent assimilationist tendencies. The analysis can proceed with a mixed group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, or each alone depending on the project being undertaken. If the latter, then linkages will need to be made between the different packages of advice. The specific role of critical friends is not clearly documented in the literature, particularly as the stimulus of new thinking, of new fundamental thinking. It must involve a combination of democratic suggestion and a capacity to move beyond current understandings. Practitioner research is not practitioner research without a rigorous critical friend capacity.

- The issue of critique in terms of critical theory does not mean attention is only directed at the structures, organization and policies of an institution, but is broadened to include critique of the socio-economic and cultural environment within which the project is located. While an action research study of improving mathematics at the Grade III level is important for example, the critical theorist will attempt to see the teaching of school mathematics within a historical and ideological context, recognising that schools reproduce the norms of society and that these may be substantially changed for mathematical learning. This is much more than a resource question, but one of how society understands mathematics and how humans come to think mathematically. A society based on a strict stratification and status will approach these intellectual questions differently to a society that integrates knowledges and practices across social groupings. This means that the division of knowledge into privileged segments is a non-neutral act by those who control knowledge and who can manipulate it for specific interest. Critique needs to take up these questions in research work, all research work, as an emancipatory project.

In debating the nature of knowledge, Habermas (1996a) criticised Popper's views regarding a positivistic or technical approach to rationality in the following terms:

> Now, even in its positivistic form the critique of ideology can pursue an interest in adult autonomy; as the example of Popper shows, it need not stop at an adherence to the technical interests of knowledge. Certainly, Popper was one of the first to insist on the demarcation rigidly drawn by the logic of science between knowing and valuing. He too identifies the knowledge of empirical science conforming to the rules of a cogent universal methodology with science as such; he too simply accepts the residual definition of thought, which is purged of the components of rational volition.

Habermas's notion of communicative action was advanced to solve this dilemma and to combat an imperialistic science. This approach is designed to emphasise truth in language or more specifically linguistics, where social actors seek to reach understanding in a non- coercive manner through dialogue. In a significant departure with the economic imperative of social theory, Habermas suggested a separation between system and lifeworld to the extent that systemic influences could be discounted as much as possible on the generation of thought. Popper on the other hand, described a 'World 3' theory of cognition (materials, minds, structures respectively, the latter in the human domain consisting of language, ethics, philosophy, science and the like) with World 3 objects able to exist separately and independently of the knowing subject. While criticised on the grounds of idealism (Cook, 2001), the theory of communicative action does at least provide a counter-balance to a merely technical rationalism or rigid scientism and argues for the inclusion of culture and values into the search for truth and can guide the draft procedures noted above in a participatory and action research way. The debate between Habermas and Popper on the question of knowledge, can inform the establishment of research methodologies and their constitutive perspectives or socio-cultural views.

The action research literature while being persuasive is somewhat deficient in not containing compelling research findings to confirm emancipatory learning. Learning of this type must directly challenge the most deeply held values, beliefs and practices of participants and assist in the development of ideas that are more closely aligned with the grand narratives of peace, justice, rationality and reconciliation. Marcuse (1989) described the role of critical theory in this matrix of

reconciling antitheses and of reason constituting the highest potentiality of humankind: 'For when reason is accorded the status of substance, this means that at its highest level, as authentic reality, the world no longer stands opposed to the rational thought of men as mere material objectivity. Rather it is now comprehended by thought and defined as concept'. If researchers do not personally trend in this direction over extended periods of time, then the process is not truly emancipatory and it is misleading to use the term. Setting a benchmark related to the great issues and narratives of aggression, dispossession and racism may be helpful in evaluating the emancipatory intent of a research or educational program.

Generating community knowledge

Nyerna Studies is a four-year Bachelor of Education partnership program that is being developed and implemented by the Koori people of the Echuca region of Australia and Victoria University of Technology. Its first group of seven fully qualified teachers graduated at the end of 2001; two of the graduates are Koori. Currently, sixty student teachers are enrolled across the four year levels with approximately one-third being Koori. The program is highly innovative, community-based, pursuing holistic and enquiry learning and projects that are negotiated around integrated areas of student interest. To combat assimilationist tendencies, the program is more conceptual and reflective than skill oriented with practice being the starting point for investigation. Assessment is non-graded to support cultural inclusiveness and a diverse range of intellectual artefacts. While the issue of 'whiteness' is present, the balance of Koori/non-Koori student numbers is a simplistic method of analysis.

It is to be expected that the educational cauldron of Nyerna Studies will generate challenging and disquieting thoughts and practices for all participants. This is particularly so when different cultural backgrounds and experiences are brought to bear on serious issues of mutual concern regarding education and relationships between the community and university. One of these issues is knowledge production. In the case of formal academic or scientific research as noted above that is designed to create new knowledge, emphasis is placed on the reliability of data and the validity of findings that are often expressed in the form of a generalised statement or theory. In the social sciences however emphasis may be more to do with the establishment of flexible frameworks of investigation that enable new ideas to be approached and reformed over time. Generalisations in the form of theories or laws do not usually result, as do hypotheses that are the basis for ongoing redrafting. Processes of this type have been termed 'naturalistic inquiry' by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and have the following comparative characteristics:

- Statement of a problem, evaluand, policy option. The research design will act as a means of investigating the statement, will contain an appropriate rationale and the outcomes to be achieved.
- Statement of a theoretical perspective. Conventional research does not always include a theoretical approach to knowledge production, particularly that which sees truth residing in objectivity, method and data.
- Statement of procedure. Often seen as the most important aspect of the study, procedure tends to dominate a view of knowledge itself. More interpretive research will recognise that data is one aspect of knowledge production.
- Time schedule. The short time frame of most educational research detracts from its generalisibility whereas naturalistic research will intend to be ongoing.

- Designation of agents. In community research, the participants indeed researchers themselves may not have recognised qualifications in the field and will often vary as the program unfolds. The CV is not as important.
- Program budget. A similar consideration for conventional and community research.
- Statement of end products. Scientific studies are able to specify outcomes to a much greater extent that community research.

Participatory action research offers a framework of best fit in relation to the above considerations for naturalistic enquiries, particularly for Indigenous communities (Ivanitz, 1999). It is an approach that allows democratic relationships to be established between participants, one that encourages flexibility and uncertainty in regards to process and outcomes and one that draws upon the political perspective and cultural histories of communities. Action research that is truly participatory will challenge the current views of the research team with the data and interpretation of enquiry and will impact upon belief and value systems as analysis and interpretation continues. In discussing different philosophical approaches to truth and the derivation of human meaning, Kaplan (1964) points out:

> A statement is meaningful if it can enter into the making of a decision and its meaning is analysable in terms of the difference it makes to the decision taken. To get at the meaning of a statement, the logical positivist asks, 'What would the world be like if it were true?' The operationalist asks, 'What would we have had to do to come to believe it?' For the pragmatist, the question is, 'What would we do if we did believe it?' To believe a proposition is not to lay hold of an abstract entity called 'truth' with a correspondingly abstract 'mind'. It is to make a choice between alternative sets of strategies for action.

As noted previously, the action research literature while supporting such a participatory ideology does not pursue with data the 'choice between strategies' approach, designed to create personal and political change in such an interventionist manner, let alone studies that demonstrate the influence that participation has had on personal morality, world views and perspectives. Nor the corroborative insight outlined by Semchison (2001), that Indigenous knowing unfolds 'into a colourful, visual dialogue of knowledge, place spirit..' so that '..Indigenous approaches to knowledge are much more provocative in enhancing and expanding creative learning than just the linear paradigms of the structured academic processes ..' This indicates that conservative research rhetoric is not in complete accord with the reality of communities and that all the characteristics required to consummate this process are not present. Until this happens and the literature is able to report educational research that trends substantially towards the 'socially critical' and a process that is life defining for participants, the struggle for legitimation of community research will continue.

Two-way enquiry learning

In discussing the question of subjectivity, Cherry (1999) has suggested action research 'requires the researcher to balance action and private reflection with collective enquiry. To devalue the enormous amount of private or internal dialogue that accompanies interactive research of any kind and which is certainly involved in the production of a thesis is to discount data that is potentially very valuable.' For this reason, educational research can draw upon the experience of projects that are conducted in partnership with Indigenous communities, projects that must begin with local

political circumstances and be respectful of the range of cultural perspectives that exist between participants. To generate new knowledge or to construct a community thesis will fail if this approach is not followed.

Different models for reconciliation between cultures have not been entirely successful worldwide and always contain the danger of cultural assimilation or domination. In its own small way, the Nyerna Studies program has suggested a tentative theory of 'two-way learning' (Hooley, 2002) that in the educational context has enabled Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to confront big issues from diverse viewpoints. The outcome here is not intended as a complete fusion of culture and ideas, but the creation of new thinking and practices on major activity, while at the same time maintaining non-coercive cultural domains and traditions. The notion of 'two-way' is brought together with systematic enquiry so that a new synthesis of understanding is reached in the area under consideration. The seven dimensions of 'two-way enquiry learning' are noted below:

- Continuity of experience as the basis of all learning programs.
- Recognition that the expression of learning occurs in different ways for different people based on their cultural and socio-economic background.
- Long-term systematic processes of reflection on experience.
- Integrated theory and practice including respect fro and learning with the natural environment.
- Teaching and learning that enables a framework of holistic, integrated and constructed knowledge.
- Validation of learning, knowledge, experience and propositions that is based upon long-term consensual communication and democratic dialogue.
- Holistic views of life and learning where knowledge arises from and returns to social and cultural environments.

These dimensions in total are usually not found in formal educational programs at any level. They certainly do not characterise university work. They are congruent with the requirements for participatory action research and, in fact, blur the boundaries between the two, between teaching and research. The theory or working hypothesis of 'two-way enquiry learning' is one example of generalised knowledge that has emerged from the practice of Nyerna Studies in a naturalistic manner and which in turn, can guide practice for further understandings. It does not seek to impose its will on community members and participants, but is there to strengthen the framework of democratic study and of changing reality for community benefit. At particular times, systematic reflection can be introduced and facilitated by a critical friend to assist the formulation of new ideas, to challenge stereotypes and to explore unfamiliar paradigms if possible. Hopefully, the pessimistic view of Langton (2002) that 'Our fate will always be entwined with Australians who are historically and intellectually blind to difference' can be combated successfully. Participatory action research needs to structure itself in such a way and to identify outcomes of a substantial nature if it is to be recognised by the community and academy alike.

Questions of validity and ethical process are appropriate for both scientific and naturalistic research. It may be however that as with other features, different concepts are also appropriate for each, based on the reality of human transactions. As Pritchard (2002) describes, practitioner researchers interact with colleagues 'in the natural flow of activity, rather than adhering to a set operational plan. Things are said, events happen and information comes to light that were not

anticipated.' The validation of a working hypothesis may be seen as part of an ongoing discussion and communication between participants, rather than a checking of experiment and data alone. In this case, truth or perhaps more accurately trustworthiness emerges over time as the practical outcomes of a research program are witnessed. Truth is not seen in the data, but in social practice and the subsequent human interpretation of data by application of human reason. When it is generally agreed by participants that statements made are accurate and in accord with community experience and understanding, then a pragmatic validity has been achieved.

From an ethical point of view, naturalistic research centres not so much on formal consent and confidentiality, but agreement on a democratic process that establishes a respectful and open relationship between participants, that expects the unexpected and can deal with changes of direction that inevitably occur. It may even be concerned with 'disturbing unequal power relations in research' (Lather, 1991). This is a major difference with scientific research that attempts to lay down a set process with key points that must be followed at predetermined times. Rather than being dominated by budgetary issues, naturalistic research will proceed through cycles of investigation as they occur and will reach a stage of development at the end of the given time frame, whatever that stage happens to be. Knowledge production under these circumstances is based upon long, indeed life long processes of practice, reflection and theorising with groups of people considering truth from a collaborative, historical and biographical standpoint.

Contrary to popular belief particularly within the humanities, it is significant that there is a crossover of approaches between the physical and social sciences. While the physical sciences are concerned with prediction and control of the environment and an understanding of the universe, it is not accurate to extend that argument and claim that the physical sciences want to predict and control people. Einstein and Darwin do not hold a gun to anyone's head. Nor do Marx, Dewey or Gardner for that matter. Throughout the development of modern science and its break with religion, humans have attempted to do their own thinking and to establish their own intellectual authority, a process that is of assistance to democratic life. Practising scientists do not work in a political vacuum, but use a combination of intent, imagination, curiosity, creativity, as they attempt to grapple with observation, ambiguity and contradiction inherent in the natural world. Building and analysing a new molecule requires an integrated an innovative procedure utilising the many varied connections with social existence. There needs to be a bringing together of appropriate strategies from the physical and social sciences for the benefit of each.

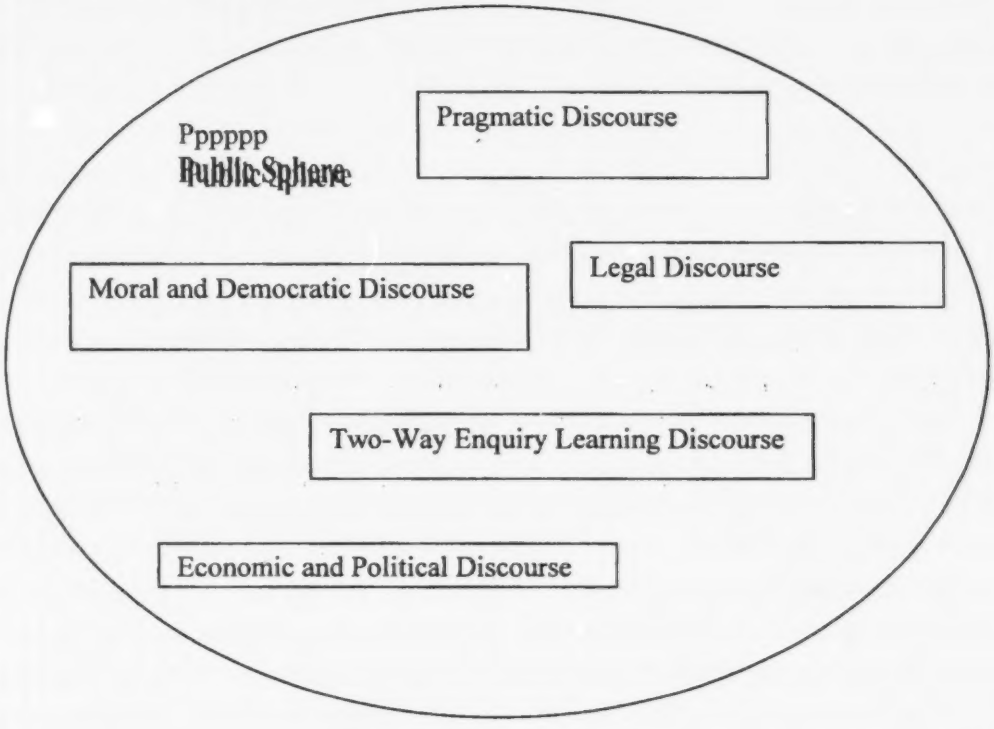
Educational public sphere

An idealised view of the polity into a disconnected 'lifeworld' and 'system' such that daily interactions can proceed unencumbered by economic and social class factors, is not in the interests of the overwhelming majority of people. What is useful however is the advice that citizens participate in 'public spheres' (Habermas, 1996b) of communication and engagement designed to elaborate key issues of the day, to clarify different points of view and, based on the evidence and quality of argument, to consider transformation of personal position into something else. The public sphere is not concerned with decision making as such at the national or local levels, but it does enable the development of informed viewpoints on which formal decision-making can proceed.

The genesis of public spheres already exist in conversations and debates concerning the environment, employment, women, war and peace as found in the social capital of community

organizations, trade unions, parliamentary parties, schools and universities. It may be that each of these discourses constitutes a separate public sphere in its own right, or these need to combine some way depending on the issue and conditions under which the discussion is conducted. The impact of the media is significant, as too the democratic procedures by which discussions occurs to ensure that opinions are heard, considered and handled appropriately. It is suggested here that 'two-way enquiry learning' can form a linking mechanism in an educational public sphere, as in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Educational Public Sphere



In this representation, an educational public sphere is comprised of a series of discourses all of which are necessary to have a complete examination of educational questions. Two-way enquiry learning is a discourse itself encompassing seven dimensions that enable a number of other contributing discourses to be activated. If the notions of 'two-way learning' and systematic enquiry are not linked dialectically with the other discourses
then it is difficult to see by what process new ideas and practices will emerge. In designing the next cycle of a research program for example, the first step of disclosing anew the political perspective of each participant will be frustrated. How will legal views and assumptions inform the pragmatics of research unless a mechanism like two-way enquiry learning is adopted? How will economic bias be combated within a research program if not by a systematic process of reflection on data as it accumulates? Can any research program ignore what Bowles and Gintis (2002) call the 'correspondence principle, namely by structuring social interactions and individual rewards to replicate the environment of the workplace' and maintain the integrity of Indigenous rights?

As critical theorists confronting the Indigenous question would argue, the field of education, community research and knowledge production cannot be considered in isolation from the social debate concerning rights versus issues. Is the correct strategy one that places Indigenous rights related to land, equality before the law, recognition of past wrongs, compensation, or one that demands action on issues such as violence, welfare dependency and alcoholism? In noting Pearson's view that 'Our dispossession is the ultimate cause of our passive welfare dependency', Behrendt (2002) comments that '... there is not one quick fix to systemic legacies of colonisation. Recognising this does not mean being fatalistic about welfare policy. Rather, it means ensuring that the responses are holistic and attempt structural change.' This is the guide to a critical research agenda in education. To link the immediate concerns of local communities with the broader context of Indigenous rights and to provide outcomes that will restructure schools for the mutual benefit of all students.

It is clear that the legitimation and validity of community research shall rest on factors of social justice, not the artificiality of academic form. The progressive viewpoint however will always struggle to be heard in any battlefield, let alone one such as education and educational research that is relatively young and has not as yet established its parameters and principles. Philosophical and ideological contestation between technical, practical and emancipatory rationality and the epistemologies that ensue means that fundamental questions of practice will take decades or centuries to be resolved. In the short term, the misunderstandings, illusions, contradictions and inconsistencies existing between the physical and social sciences can act as points of departure for investigation and enlightenment, of construction and reconstruction of values and belief and eventually, an agreed terrain of human understanding that is grounded in community experience and aspiration.

Naturalistic enquiry undertaken as participatory action research over long time frames appears as the only research paradigm that will recognise and respect the knowledge, culture and wisdom of community participants. It will need to adopt the perspective outlined by Barta (2002) that 'The Indigenous paradigm or Native way of knowing relies on an awareness and respect for all things. There is a holistic and relational way of perceiving the world and a striving to live in harmony within that sphere'. On this basis, the struggle for legitimation within more conservative and accepted western research methodologies is not necessary. For Indigenous peoples, this point may also not be significant. In the general context of research however, that is the broad conceptual framework that guides experiment and investigation, conventional wisdom that denies the full participation of communities and ordinary people in constructing their own research knowledges and ethics, must be resisted.

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